



Creating Schools That Work: *Lessons for Reform from Successful Urban High Schools*

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Acknowledgements and Preface

Historically, urban high schools have proven to be the most challenging educational institutions in which to effect lasting reform. Yet policymakers and practitioners in Massachusetts have had insufficient evidence to guide their decision making on the conditions that work to improve student achievement at this level. To address this gap and to highlight urban high schools in the Commonwealth that have had the most success in increasing student performance, the Center for Education Research & Policy (CERP) at MassINC, Jobs for the Future (JFF), and the Center for Collaborative Education (CCE) have partnered to explore this critical issue and generate discussion around possible strategies for leveraging best practices used in Massachusetts urban high schools that are improving.

In *Head of the Class: Characteristics of Higher Performing Urban High Schools in Massachusetts*, CERP identified nine urban schools in Massachusetts that show, to varying degrees, that they can get impressive academic results with the student populations education reform is meant to serve. *Creating Schools That Work*, the product of a collaboration between the Center for Collaborative Education and Jobs for the Future, uses the CERP findings to present state and district policy recommendations for creating the conditions by which a far greater number of urban high schools in the state can successfully educate their diverse student bodies and prepare them to succeed in college and beyond. In doing so, we seek to create a policy climate in which urban high schools can be successful in raising the achievement of all student groups and eliminating the achievement gap between low-income, predominantly students of color and their more advantaged middle-class peers.

This joint effort builds on the complementary skills and strengths of JFF and CCE. Both organizations are experienced in working with districts on small school and small learning community strategies, with a focus for CCE on direct work with schools and for JFF on research and the policy arena. JFF and CCE are both partners with the Boston Public Schools and other organizations as the city implements a number of small schools through a variety of strategies, including reprogramming existing facilities, further developing existing small schools, and creating new small schools.

The mission of the Center for Collaborative Education is to improve student learning in K-12 public schools and districts by creating small, democratic, and equitable schools. The Center seeks to influence the larger public's view on education to better support autonomous and flexible schools in which students and teachers know each other well and teaching and learning are purposeful and have value beyond school. CCE currently coordinates the Boston Pilot Schools Network, the New England Small Schools/ Coalition of Essential Schools Network, and the National Turning Points Network, providing schools within each network with coaching, professional development, advocacy, and research. Recent research reports include *How Are Pilot Schools Faring?: Student Demographics, Engagement, and Performance*; *How Boston Pilot Schools Use Freedom Over Budget, Staffing, and Scheduling To Meet Student Needs*; and *How Pilot Schools Authentically Assess Student Mastery*.

A non-profit research, consulting, and advocacy organization, Jobs for the Future works to strengthen our society by creating educational and economic opportunity for those who need it most. Through partnerships with states and communities, national and local foundations, and other organizations, and through its research, policy development, and practical, on-the-ground projects, JFF accelerates opportunities for people to advance in education and careers. Recent research reports include *Ready for Tomorrow: Helping All Students Achieve Secondary and Postsecondary Success*; *Four Building Blocks for a System of Educational Opportunity*; and *Large to Small: Strategies for Personalizing the High School*. JFF coordinates the Early College High School Initiative, a nationwide effort to create over 100 high schools that meet the intellectual and developmental needs of young people who now fail to complete high school or drop out in the first years of college.

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Creating Schools That Work: Lessons for Reform from Successful Urban High Schools

Executive Summary

There is no more pressing problem in education today than closing the achievement gap between low-income, predominantly students of color in urban schools and their more advantaged middle-class peers in predominantly white suburban schools. *Head of the Class: Characteristics of Higher Performing Urban High Schools in Massachusetts*, a study by the Center for Education Research & Policy at MassINC (CERP), identifies nine urban schools in Massachusetts that show, to varying degrees, that they can get impressive academic results with the student populations education reform is meant to serve. But if success in urban high schools is possible, the question before policymakers is this: how do you make every urban high school the kind of place where students, regardless of background, can get a high quality education?

Head of the Class identifies some of the characteristics of higher-performing urban high schools in Massachusetts. On the most general level, the CERP findings are consistent with a considerable academic literature on effective urban high schools. Such schools are typically marked by a culture that is single-minded in the best sense: they are highly focused on a core academic curriculum and college preparation. The faculty are highly skilled and share a commitment to work together to foster the success of all students. Students are well known by their teachers and receive personalized support and encouragement. There are clear, agreed-upon standards of performance for all members of the school community—administrators, teachers, parents, and students—with strong bonds of mutual commitment and obligation to achieve the school's mission.

If these characteristics of high-performing schools are well known, the policies that give schools these attributes remain more elusive. Examination of the nine schools singled out in the CERP study suggests certain principles that, if applied to urban high school reform, could lead to greater success for urban youth:

- **Small is better.** Even though small schools comprised less than one-third of the pool of urban high schools in the study, seven of the nine schools (78 percent) ranked as higher performing had enrollments of less than 400. Small schools not only dominate the list of better-performing schools, they also provide the only truly high-performing school: University Park Campus School, the only school in

the study to achieve MCAS results comparable to upper-middle-class suburban communities.

- **Autonomy on matters of staffing, budget, curriculum, governance, and time is as critical as size.** These small schools share a freedom from the bureaucratic constraints that prevent most urban schools from creating high-functioning learning environments. Seven of the nine schools cited as higher performing have substantial freedom over their resources and how they use them.
- **Choice is associated with achievement.** For the seven small schools designated as higher performing, students, faculty, and parents voluntarily elect to join the school, a process that helps create and sustain a culture of achievement.
- **Extra resources make a difference.** The schools in this study are entrepreneurial in acquiring additional public and private funds. They make judicious use of these funds to pay for additional support for students during the school day, as well as before- and after-school tutoring and Saturday or summer preparatory programs.
- **Well-conceived, structured, and supported inclusion programs can be effective in educating English language learners and students with special needs.** In all seven small schools, inclusion of English language learners and students with special needs is the philosophy and norm of practice. The design of these schools is based on the principle that all students can benefit from participation in a common core academic program, with appropriate accommodations for students' unique learning needs.
- **College and community partnerships help.** Each of the higher performing schools has a formal partnership with at least one university or corporation. University partnerships have a particularly powerful impact in supporting high professional standards and practice among faculty and a college-going culture among students.
- **Incorporating earlier grades is a potent strategy for closing the achievement gap in high school.** The two high schools with the highest proportion of students achieving proficient and advanced standing on MCAS begin working with students in the middle school grades.

- **Stronger school and student accountability provisions make a difference in creating academically challenging communities of learning.** Five of the nine schools—two Boston Pilot schools and three charter schools—are subject to a more rigorous and comprehensive accountability process than that for regular public schools.

The challenge, then, is to create the policy environment, at both the local and state levels, that enables more urban high schools to apply these principles in transforming secondary education for urban youth. With this in mind, we offer the following recommendations for districts and the state:

1. Create small high schools in grades 9-12.

At the state level:

Provide financial incentives for urban school districts to create small high schools. These should include establishing a new state renovation fund to help urban districts create small schools within existing facilities, and targeting state construction funds toward building small urban high schools or larger facilities that house multiple small high schools.

At the district level:

Adopt a local policy that charts a course toward small high schools. One means is the converting of existing large high schools into multiple small, autonomous high schools that share the same facility. Another is by identifying city-owned facilities that could house new small high schools.

2. Provide small high schools with charter-like autonomy over budget, staffing, curriculum, governance, time, and space.

At the state level:

Target small school incentives to districts that provide substantial autonomy for these schools and encourage the development of Horace Mann charter schools by making it easier and more attractive for schools to gain this charter status.

At the district level:

Negotiate contract language with all unions to create Pilot schools, modeled after the landmark agreement between the Boston Public Schools and the Boston Teachers Union; in the absence of a Pilot agreement, grant a range of operating autonomies to new, small urban high schools.

3. Create a stronger accountability model that holds schools accountable for having effective practices for all students.

At the state level:

Adopt a school quality review model of accountability for all urban high schools that considers multiple

indicators of student engagement and performance and that assesses the “value-added” contribution of a high school to its students’ MCAS performance; strengthen charter school accountability to ensure that charter schools are representative of students in their host district; and require charter schools with patterns of low performance to adopt a proven urban school model or lose their charter.

At the district level:

Implement a school quality review model of accountability for all district high schools that includes multiple indicators of student engagement and performance and a value-added methodology to evaluate school performance on MCAS.

4. Leverage benefits of choice to build more effective school communities.

At the state level:

Increase the supply of small schools that serve students in underperforming districts by building bipartisan support for a system of small schools of choice; focusing the state’s intervention strategy for failing urban schools and districts on creating new, small school choice options for students and parents; and prioritizing charter awards to small schools in underperforming districts while ensuring that charter schools serve a cross-section of students.

At the district level:

Make the principle of voluntary membership in small, personalized, and academically challenging high schools for students and staff alike a cornerstone of district policy and teacher union labor agreements, phasing out large, failing high schools and replacing them with small, autonomous schools of choice.

5. Create effective inclusion programs for English language learners (ELL) and students with special needs.

At the state level:

Identify and promote, through revised regulations, effective inclusion programs and strategies for urban high school ELL and special needs students; collaborate with colleges and universities to revise teacher preparation programs to promote dual certification in academic content area and English as a second language or special education.

At the district level:

Create a process by which schools can serve substantially separate special education students in regular education classrooms with appropriate support; provide adequate language support to non-native English speaking students in regular academic classes and programs; and identify, highlight, and promote effective inclusion programs within the district for urban high school ELL and special needs students.

6. Create more 6-12 and 7-12 schools.

At the state level:

Provide incentives for urban school districts to create small high schools with grade 6-12 and 7-12 configurations, and give priority to this secondary school design in awarding Horace Mann and Commonwealth charters.

At the district level:

Make the creation of small secondary schools that start in grade six or seven a priority in high school reform initiatives.

7. Make college and community partnerships a cornerstone of state and district strategies to create high schools of excellence for low-income urban students and students of color.

At the state level:

Enlist every public college and university in the state to create at least one substantial university-school partnership with a small high school that enrolls a high percentage of low-income students and students of color; restore and increase spending in the state's Dual Enrollment Program to support low-income students and students of color who take college courses as part of the college-preparatory experience; and revise teacher training programs to include internships in partner schools in urban districts.

At the district level:

Make college partnerships an essential component of a district's small schools strategy and mobilize political, civic, and higher education partners to support a high-profile initiative to make college and community partnerships a cornerstone of the community's urban high school reform strategy; and identify ways to effectively target public and private support for academic and other enrichment activities to support coherent partnership models.

8. Provide high schools that enroll high percentages of low-income students and other high-need groups with increased resources.

At the state level:

Revise state per-pupil funding formulas to increase the weighting for urban high schools, and enact regulations that allow urban high schools to carry over funds from one fiscal year to the next.

At the district level:

Create weighted formulas when determining high school budgets, providing higher per pupil allocations to schools that serve students with the greatest needs, and give schools the flexibility to target resources by reallocating all centrally based professional development funds to the school level.

9. Provide strong incentives for higher performing urban schools to replicate their success.

At the state level:

Give priority in charter awards to the operators of higher performing urban schools who wish to create additional schools based on their models and practices, and to applicants that form replication partnerships with these school operators; and provide grant incentives to school districts to replicate successful models of small high schools.

At the district level:

Grant the leadership of high-performing small high schools in the district the authority to open and operate a second school site, and invite the operators of successful small urban schools elsewhere to replicate their models in the district.

Creating Schools That Work: Lessons for Reform from Successful Urban High Schools

There is no more pressing problem in education today than closing the achievement gap between low-income, predominantly students of color in urban schools and their more advantaged middle-class peers in predominantly white suburban schools. For more than a decade, the goal of education reform has been to make sure all students meet the high academic standards necessary for success in college and beyond. The key to reaching that goal is giving every student in our cities the chance to attend schools that have the proven ability to accelerate learning for low-income students and students of color, while improving learning for all students. Yet most urban teens go to school every day in institutions that are not yet up to the challenge.

The Center for Education Research & Policy (CERP) at MassINC has identified nine urban schools in Massachusetts that show, to varying degrees, that they can get impressive academic results with the student populations education reform is meant to serve. Among these nine schools, University Park Campus School is in a class by itself, with MCAS scores comparable to high-performing suburban schools. Boston Arts Academy, Fenway High School, and Lynn Classical High School also achieve a level of performance that is substantially higher than their urban peers. Five other schools—Academy of the Pacific Rim, Accelerated Learning Laboratory, MATCH (Media and Technology Charter High School), Sabis International, and Somerville High School—are also higher performing in terms of test scores, but their rates of attrition (students who leave the school prior to graduation) and grade-nine retention raise the possibility that they may be less successful with a sizeable portion of their student populations. Though they vary in performance, the nine schools singled out by CERP demonstrate that it is possible to meet higher education standards with urban students than most urban schools settle for.

But if success in urban high schools is possible, the question before policymakers is this: how do you make every urban school the kind of place where students, regardless of background, can get a high-quality education? The answer lies in an examination of the characteristics that make for a high-performing urban high school. In this paper, we try to identify those characteristics—and draw out the lessons for local and state policymakers to ensure that every urban high school is high performing.

What Makes a High-Performing Urban High School?

The CERP study allows us to identify some of the characteristics of a high-performing urban high school in Massachusetts. For students of urban school reform, nothing here is surprising. Rather, the CERP study corroborates much of what is known about schools that serve diverse and low-income urban students best. Adding as it does to the existing literature on high-performing urban schools, however, the CERP study does provide further hints about what it takes to create and sustain schools that succeed with every student.

On the most general level, the CERP findings are consistent with a considerable academic literature about the features of effective urban schools.¹ This formula includes:

- A rigorous, college-preparatory core curriculum in which all students are expected to master a common core of skills and knowledge required for college success;
- A clear sense of purpose and relentless commitment among all members of the school community (administrators, teachers, parents, and students) that all students can and will achieve a set of well-defined, high academic standards. In such environments, all members of the community, including students, feel a mutual commitment to one another's success, as well as a strong belief that effort will yield results;
- Well-defined, agreed-upon standards of performance and behavior for all members of the school community and a commitment to measure and review performance against these standards;

- A personalized, supportive learning environment in which students are well known by their teachers, feel a strong sense of belonging, and receive the encouragement, personalized instruction, and extra help they need to succeed in demanding academic classes;
- A faculty with the content knowledge and instructional skills required to teach intellectually rich, demanding subject matter to heterogeneous classes comprised of students with varied academic backgrounds and skills; and
- A strong collegial and collaborative faculty culture that encourages teachers to work together to improve their professional practice and solve instructional problems, and that empowers teachers to make decisions based on their analysis of what will work. Effective collegial practice includes a willingness of teachers to share failures and mistakes as well as successes, and to constructively analyze and criticize practices and procedures.

If these characteristics of high-performing schools are well known, the policies that give schools these attributes remain more elusive. Boiling down these attributes a bit further, the CERP study suggests certain principles that, if applied to urban high school restructuring, could lead to greater success for urban youth. Looking at the nine schools singled out for praise in the CERP study, we draw the following conclusions about urban high school reform:

When it comes to creating high schools that effectively deliver a rigorous academic program to all students, small is better.

Even though small schools comprised less than one-third of the pool of urban high schools in the study, seven of the nine schools (78 percent) ranked as higher performing had enrollments of less than 400.² Small schools not only dominate the list of better performing schools, they also provide the only truly high performing school. University Park Campus School, the only school in the study to achieve MCAS results comparable to upper-middle class suburban communities, cites its small size as a critical condition for its success.

The benefits of small size are many when it comes to implementing a rigorous academic program that accelerates the learning of low-income students and students of color, while improving learning for all students. Small schools operate on a human scale: by their very size they allow for greater personalization. Students and adults can build meaningful relationships and know one another well. Small size makes it easier for a school to develop a shared sense of purpose and to organize itself around the goal of high academic achievement, including delivery of a rigorous core academic program to all students. Small size also fosters personalized instruction and supportive adult-student relationships, shared decision making and a collaborative professional environment, and a culture in which all members (administrators, faculty, students, and parents) experience the obligations as well as the rewards of belonging to a community that shares a profound commitment to one another's success.

While two large high schools earned designation as “higher performing urban schools,” neither appears as effective in fostering the achievement of low-income students and students of color as many of the smaller schools.³ At Somerville High, the better performer of the two large schools that made the list, administrators attribute much of their success to their ability to create a “small school-like environment” by clustering its ninth- and tenth-grade students into houses of 100 that share a common team of teachers. The creation of smaller learning communities within large comprehensive high schools is a reform strategy that is gaining in popularity in urban districts. However, it is important to note that small learning communities often differ in a number of key ways from small schools. Students and faculty often have “cross-over” courses, with students taking and teachers teaching courses outside of their respective small learning communities. As well, small learning communities do not have as much control over staffing, budget, curriculum, governance, and schedule as do small schools. As a result, small learning communities are often unable to achieve the level of personalization and adult accountability that one finds in most small schools and that is most associated with positive results.

Size alone is not enough. A school's ability to implement a high-standards curriculum for all requires autonomy on matters of staffing, budget, curriculum, governance, and time.

While small size appears to be an important enabling condition for the schools designated as high performing in the CERP study, size alone does not give these schools the ability to execute their educational vision. These small schools also share a freedom from the typical bureaucratic constraints that prevent most urban schools from creating high-functioning learning environments. When it comes to autonomy over key school decisions, seven of the nine schools cited have substantial freedom over their resources and how they use them. In fact, the four small district high schools that ranked as high performing have more in common with charter schools than with traditional high schools within their districts.

Two of the schools, Fenway High School and Boston Arts Academy, are Pilot schools. In Boston, Pilot schools have been granted substantial school-based authority over staffing, budget, curriculum, governance, and time as compared to the typical Boston public school. These schools, along with the three small charter schools, have the power to select faculty who subscribe to the educational philosophy of the school; to deploy staff and other resources in the most efficient manner to deliver a streamlined, core academic program to all students; to hold staff and students accountable for high standards of performance; to create collaborative leadership and governance structures; and to design and adapt the curriculum and instructional methods in response to results. Accelerated Learning Laboratory and University Park Campus School are both part of the Worcester Public School system, but they informally enjoy a higher degree of freedom than other district schools in determining what happens within the walls of their respective schools.

Choice counts. A voluntary but non-exclusive membership process makes for mutual accountability and a high achievement culture for all.

For the seven small schools designated as higher performing, having a formal process by which students, faculty, and parents voluntarily elect to join the school helps create and sustain a culture of achievement. The process of “opting-in” to the school community involves clearly defined obligations and commitments by faculty, students, and parents to one another and, ultimately, to each student’s success. Schools are able to use this voluntary membership process to set much higher expectations for performance than are typical in most urban schools and to hold all parties accountable for living up to their end of this new “educational contract.” Each school engages in this process of opting in without screening for level of academic achievement; indeed, each of these small schools successfully enrolls a student population that is representative of their respective district’s demographics (or, in the case of the three charters, the district from which they draw students). The goal is to ensure the best match between student and school in order to provide the highest chance possible of academic success for the student.

The practice of the highest performing school in the study, University Park Campus School (UPCS), illustrates the power and benefits of making each member of the school community understand and commit to the terms of participation. UPCS is a neighborhood school that draws all its students from Main South, the poorest section of Worcester. Families who live in Main South have the choice of attending several middle and high school programs in the city. According to the former principal and founder of the school, Donna Rodrigues, UPCS strongly encourages all neighborhood families to enter the lottery for a space at UPCS. But the school also makes it clear to parents and potential students that things will be very different at UPCS than at most schools in the city. The school guarantees that every student will get the support and help her or she needs to be prepared for college. But the school also makes it clear that this will require hard work. By the ninth grade, all students will be enrolled in honors-level courses and be expected to do two to three hours of homework each night. Parents who choose to send their children to UPCS have some basic obligations. They are responsible for making sure that their children

attend school and do their homework. (For example, keeping them home from school to baby sit a younger sibling would not be tolerated.) In turn, the UPCS faculty pledge that no children will ever be sent home with homework they don't understand and that extra help and homework support will be readily available. Teachers who opt to work at UPCS are also expected to agree to the terms of this social and educational compact of high expectations and mutual obligation.

Extra resources make a difference in helping low-income, urban youth achieve at levels comparable to their more advantaged white, suburban peers.

Many of the schools in this study take advantage of their autonomy over budget and staffing decisions to deploy limited resources more effectively than the traditional schools in their districts. For example, Fenway High and Boston Arts Academy use the authority granted by their Pilot status to hire staff who are dual certified to teach a combined English-social studies humanities class, and to spend a greater proportion of their budgets on classroom teachers. UPCS, which receives the same per pupil allotment as the other Worcester district high schools, is able to offer smaller classes and more classroom time in core academic subjects by spending more of its faculty payroll on core academic teachers.

But the freedom to spend money and deploy staff differently is not enough. The schools in this study are entrepreneurial in acquiring additional public and private funds. They make judicious use of these funds to pay for additional support for students during the school day, as well as before- and after-school tutoring and Saturday or summer preparatory programs.

They also use funds to pay for staff planning and development time to improve their craft of teaching and to develop and implement effective curriculum. For example, Fenway High and Boston Arts Academy both structure longer school days for students for four days per week in order to have an early release day each week, freeing up a substantial block of time for teachers to collaborate. In addition, both schools have week-long summer retreats for all faculty to prepare for the coming school year.

For some of the schools, extra funds are used to provide extended instructional time. UPCS staff cite the longer school day (8 hours versus 6.5), which costs about \$500 per student to operate, as an important factor in helping the large proportion of students who enter the school with limited English proficiency catch up to their more advantaged peers and succeed in honors-level classes. Unfortunately, UPCS was forced to eliminate the longer day in 2003 as a result of district-wide budget cuts.

Well-conceived, structured, and supported inclusion programs can be effective in educating English language learners and students with special needs.

In all seven small schools, inclusion of English language learners (ELL) and students with special needs is the philosophy and norm of practice. The design of these schools is based on the principle that all students can benefit from participation in a common core academic program, with appropriate accommodations made for students' unique learning needs.

At Boston Arts Academy, the faculty and administration have adopted a philosophy that every adult in the school "owns" every student with special needs. Students with special needs are included in all regular academic classes, while also receiving support from a learning center. The learning center has been expanded to include support and enrichment for all students, not just those with special needs. Specialists in the academic areas in which there is the most student need (math and humanities) support as many students as possible. Often, in these areas, there will be two teachers assigned to classrooms, what BAA calls its "push-in" model (as opposed to "pull-out"). As part of this effort, the school has supported dual certification in special education and an academic content area for teachers to enable greater collaboration among faculty and increased support to students.

At University Park, which is a grade 7-12 design, all ELL and special needs students are included in all regular classrooms, including those ELL students who come to the school with little or no English. Since virtually every student arrives at the school reading significantly below grade level, it is the mission of the middle school staff to ensure that students enter high school reading at grade level. Instructional strategies geared to the needs of English language learners and low-literacy students include daily reading to students, daily writing, phonetic-based methods, daily use of sound charts, sub-vocal training where students read to themselves without utterance, and teachers' helping students interpret subject matter from text. Literacy initiatives across content areas continue through twelfth grade so that students are able to meet college-level demands.

College and community partnerships help schools deliver high-quality instruction and prepare students for college success.

According to the CERP report, all of the higher performing schools "have formal partnerships with at least one university or corporation and benefit in numerous ways from these affiliations. Partners provide mentors, tutors, student teachers, internships, funding, and access to college courses."

University partnerships have had a particularly powerful impact in supporting high professional standards and practice among faculty and a college-going culture among students. Clark University's partnership with UPCS stands out in this regard. Clark provides UPCS students with access to numerous campus services from day one, helping to build their identity as "little Clarkies" destined for college success. Much of the vibrancy of the professional culture at UPCS derives from the professional exchange between university and high school faculty, with UPCS staff taking as well as teaching courses at the college. Clark also provides UPCS with a pipeline of qualified teachers; student teachers who intern for a year at UPCS often hired on as permanent staff. And more than half the students at UPCS take courses at Clark their junior and senior years.

Fenway High School and the Boston Arts Academy enjoy a significant relationship with the Tufts University School of Education, which uses these schools as its main training sites for its Master's in Urban Education program. Somerville High also benefits as a training site for teaching interns enrolled at Tufts and the University of Massachusetts. MATCH students take courses at neighboring universities and also receive substantial tutoring and mentoring services through these college partners.

Incorporating earlier grades is a potent strategy for closing the achievement gap in high school.

The two high schools in the CERP study with the highest proportion of students achieving proficient and advanced standing on MCAS begin working with students in the middle school grades. At UPCS, a grade 7-12 school, 100 percent of the students scored either advanced or proficient on the tenth-grade English exam, and 80 percent scored advanced or proficient on the math exam. The Academy of the Pacific Rim, a grade 6-12 school, also achieved impressive results, with 82 percent of students scoring advanced or proficient in English, and 78 percent advanced or proficient in math. Of the remaining eight schools designated as higher performing, three are K-12 schools.

The leadership of UPCS attributes much of the school's success to starting early with students, using grades seven and eight to provide intensive literacy instruction and remediation of academic and English language skill gaps.

Stronger school and student accountability provisions make a difference in creating academically challenging communities of learning.

Five of the nine schools—the two Pilot schools and the three charter schools—are subject to a more rigorous and comprehensive accountability process than that for regular public schools. Both the Pilot school renewal process (a four-year cycle) and the state charter renewal process (a five-year cycle) require each school to provide multiple forms and sources of evidence to demonstrate that it provides all students with a challenging academic program and is successful with them. Both sets of schools are evaluated against a set of benchmarks—for which evidence is collected—and are reviewed by a team of external practitioners who spend considerable time in the school. Upon conclusion of the on-site review, each school then receives a public report of findings and recommendations, the latter of which help form a roadmap for the school's future improvement efforts. These reports result in a recommendation by the review teams regarding renewal of the school's Pilot or charter status.

Key to these processes is that the benchmarks to which these schools are held do not focus solely and narrowly on students' MCAS performance. Rather, the focus is on all aspects of a school that create quality learning environments for students. For example, the Pilot benchmarks are grouped under five categories: vision; governance, leadership, and budget; teaching and learning; professional support and development; and family and community partnerships. This school quality review process holds each Pilot and charter high school accountable to high standards of educational delivery, while providing each school with greater freedom over its resources to create the learning cultures necessary to help every student be successful.

At the student level, each of the nine CERP schools had some form of portfolio and exhibition assessment. Embedded in the authentic assessment experience is a greater focus on an in-depth curriculum in preference to superficial coverage, and placing the responsibility of the learning upon the student, with less teacher-directed instruction. For the two Pilot schools, portfolio and exhibition assessment form the cornerstone of the graduation experience, becoming high-stakes assessments at the school level to determine whether a student has adequately mastered a set of competencies in order to be deemed ready to graduate. A recently released study of the performance of Boston Pilot schools found that use of authentic assessments raised the stakes of learning for students and improved curriculum and instruction.⁴

Recommendations

The goal of the CERP study was to identify higher performing urban high schools in order to highlight that urban high schools can, in fact, assist all students to learn at high levels, and to raise the possibility that every urban high school in Massachusetts should be performing at the levels that these high schools have achieved. We have identified many common elements in the nine identified urban high schools that may contribute to their success.

The challenge, then, is to create the policy environment, both at the local and the state levels, that enables a substantially greater number of urban high schools to create and sustain similar elements that the CERP high schools have established, elements that seem to have an impact in raising the achievement of urban high school students. With this in mind, we offer the following recommendations for districts and the state.

1. Create small high schools in grades 9-12.

In the CERP study, seven of the nine identified high schools have enrollments of 400 students or less. In one of the two remaining high schools, students are clustered into small learning communities; at Somerville High, the ninth and tenth grade learning communities are 100 students each. These findings substantiate the broader education research that has found that small schools have higher student attendance and achievement, fewer discipline problems, greater attachment to school, and higher graduation and college-going rates than do large, comprehensive high schools. Small high schools can be housed in either freestanding facilities or in a larger facility that is architecturally designed to house multiple small schools, each having its own autonomy.

State departments of education often cite the economies-of-scale benefit of large high schools as an argument against small school development. But it is by no means clear that small schools are necessarily expensive schools to operate. University Park Campus School, the highest performing urban school in the CERP study, has approximately the same per pupil cost as the larger high schools in the Worcester School District, as does Fenway High School when compared to other Boston high schools.

Furthermore, as recent cohort analyses of large urban schools have shown, many lose from 40 to 60 percent of their students between ninth and twelfth grades. Given such a high attrition rate, a 1999 study found that, in New York City, “small academic and large high schools are similar in terms of budgets per graduate.” This study concludes that, since small high schools are considered “more effective” for minority and low-income students, the “similarity in [financial costs] . . . suggests that policymakers might do well to support the creation of more small high schools.”⁵ These findings were mirrored in a more recent study, which found that “measuring the cost of education by graduates rather than by all students who go through the system suggests that small schools are a wise investment.”⁶ Factoring in that high school dropouts add significantly higher future costs to society through increased crime, prison, and welfare rates, the economic argument in favor of large schools becomes even less credible.

There are several steps that the state and school districts can take to promote the development of small urban high schools.

At the state level:

- *Provide financial incentives for urban school districts to create small high schools.* Massachusetts should launch a high-profile, public-private partnership to promote small school development. The state could follow the example of North Carolina, which recently announced a \$30 million initiative to create 40 new small high schools. The initiative is being financed through a combination of government funds, corporate contributions, and private foundation grants, including \$11 million from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.
- *Create a new state school renovation fund for urban districts to create small schools within existing facilities.* Most existing large, comprehensive urban high schools could be converted into multiple small high schools by physically creating separate spaces for each small school, moving science labs so that each school has a sufficient number, and creating main offices and teacher meeting areas for each. The state could facilitate this process by providing

95 percent reimbursement to urban districts for renovating existing high school facilities for multiple small, autonomous high schools.

- *Target state construction funds toward building small urban high schools or larger facilities that house multiple small high schools.* Current state school construction funds should be weighted toward the building of small urban high schools or larger facilities that are architecturally designed to house multiple small, autonomous urban high schools. For instance, the state could offer 90 percent reimbursement for construction of facilities intended for small high schools, and 50 percent reimbursement for large high schools.

At the district level:

- *Adopt a small school policy that charts a course toward small high schools.* In 2001, the Oakland, California, public schools adopted a district policy favoring small, autonomous schools, declaring that all new schools, whether in new or existing facilities, would be small, in order to promote the advantages that small schools bring to the achievement of low-income students and students of color. Since then, district resources have been directed toward the creation of small high schools, resulting in 10 new small high schools. The policy has also served to heighten the awareness and support of parents, community, and public officials of the benefits of small schools.
- *Convert existing large high schools into multiple small, autonomous high schools that share the same facility.* There are a number of successful examples around the country of large, comprehensive high schools that have been converted into several small, autonomous high schools. While these schools continue to share common space, such as the library, cafeteria, gymnasium, and auditorium, the remainder of the facility is subdivided into separate areas for each small high school. Each small high school is given a sufficient number of classrooms, teacher meeting areas, main offices, and science labs to operate within its own space. Districts that embark on this course should pursue getting the Massachusetts Department of Education to grant each small high school its own separate state fund code, enabling each small school to gain greater autonomy over its resources. As well, the district should collaborate with the Massachusetts Interscholastic Athletic Association to gain approval to maintain one unified set of interscholastic athletic teams for the entire facility.

There are many ways for the conversion process to small, autonomous high schools to occur. Several years ago, South Boston High School, a low-performing Boston public high school, was closed down in the spring, and it reopened the following fall as an education complex housing (eventually) three small high schools. Each school was given its own headmaster, and the faculty of the large high school was divided equitably among the three new schools. Three years later, the school has shown encouraging signs of improvement—the number of students choosing one of the three small high schools has more than doubled, while attendance is up, suspensions are down, and MCAS scores are rising.

Alternatively, in a New York City small high school initiative in the Bronx, a phase-in process is being used to convert large high schools into multiple small, autonomous schools. As each class graduates from the large high school, space is reconfigured to allow the new small high schools that will take its place to enroll an incoming ninth-grade class.

- Identify city-owned facilities that could be converted into new small high schools. While state construction funds are limited, existing city-owned facilities could be reconfigured to house a small, autonomous high school. For example, in Boston, several elementary and middle schools that were closed due to the construction of new facilities have made room for new small, autonomous high schools at the old facilities.

2. Provide small high schools with charter-like autonomy over budget, staffing, curriculum, governance, time, and space.

Currently, most urban high schools operate with little flexibility in their budgets, the staffing patterns that are assigned to them, and the hiring processes that restrict the pool of applicants. They face increasing curriculum mandates and requirements, but have little say in critical policies like promotion and graduation policies that affect how learning is structured, and little control over scheduling both faculty and student learning time. If we are

going to hold our urban high schools to a higher level of accountability for the success of all the students they enroll, then we are obligated to grant them maximum control over their resources, enabling them to structure learning to meet students' needs.

Of the nine schools identified as higher performing in the CERP study, five of the schools (the three charters and the two Pilots) have substantial autonomy over budget, staffing, curriculum, governance, time, and space. Two others, UPCS and Accelerated Learning Laboratory, have had some of this autonomy informally granted to them by their district. Leaders of these schools all consider this greater degree of control over their own operations as a key ingredient in their students' higher performance.

With this in mind, the state and urban districts can do the following to increase the autonomy provided to high schools.

At the state level:

- *Restrict access to small school incentives to districts that provide substantial autonomy for these schools along the lines of Horace Mann charter schools and Boston's Pilot schools.* For promotion of small high schools to have its intended effects, small size must be linked to autonomy over staffing, budget, curriculum, governance, and time. Any incentives the state offers to encourage establishment and conversion of small schools must make that connection.
- *Revamp state legislation to make it more attractive for schools to gain Horace Mann charter status, while allowing various routes to gaining this designation.* Horace Mann charters were created in 1997 as an alternative to Commonwealth charter schools.⁷ As an in-district option that was more palatable to school committees, superintendents, and teachers unions, Horace Mann charters are one way to give schools more budgetary and operating autonomy while keeping them within the district. But it is an underutilized vehicle, with only seven Horace Mann charter schools created to date under legislation that authorized 48 statewide.

The state needs to refine the Horace Mann program to make it easier and more attractive to gain this charter status. Options for doing so could include:

- Convening the key constituencies (i.e., urban superintendents, school committees, and teacher unions) to explore what it would take to increase the numbers of Horace Mann applications;
- Providing incentive grants to urban districts and teacher unions to pursue Horace Mann status for high schools; and
- Creating multiple routes for an urban high school to gain Horace Mann charter status. For example, an urban high school could be allowed to apply directly to the state for a Horace Mann charter without gaining approval of the superintendent or local teachers union, as long as it has a two-thirds vote of the faculty in support of the move.

At the district level:

- *Negotiate contractual language with all unions (teachers, custodial, secretarial) to create Pilot schools, modeled after the landmark agreement between the Boston Public Schools and the Boston Teachers Union.* Critical to such an agreement would be granting these schools charter-like autonomy over budget, staffing, curriculum, governance, and time. In Pilot schools, faculty continue to receive union salaries and benefits and accrue seniority, but each school has the authority to establish its own unique set of voluntary work conditions, to which each staff person would agree by signing an annual work agreement. Once a district adopts the Pilot school model, a district request-for-proposal process would enable design teams of teachers, parents, community members, and others to propose new small, autonomous high schools.
- *In the absence of a Pilot agreement, grant a range of operating autonomies to new small urban high schools, giving them the management tools necessary for successfully educating the diversity of students that they serve:*
 - **Staffing:** Schools are most successful when they create a unified professional learning community. Allow small urban high schools to decide on the staffing pattern that creates the best learning environment for their students.

- Budget: Provide small high schools with a lump sum per pupil budget, allowing the school to decide on spending that provides the best programs and services to students and their families.
- Curriculum and Assessment: While holding all small high schools accountable to the MCAS, grant these schools the flexibility to determine the school-based curriculum and assessment practices that will best prepare students to be successful on this test.
- Policies: Provide small high schools with flexibility in setting promotion, graduation, discipline, and attendance policies, as long as the promotion and graduation requirements are comparable in rigor to the district requirements.
- School Calendar: Allow all small high schools to set and adjust their daily schedule for students and faculty, as long as the total student contact hours and faculty time are within the provisions of the local teachers union contract. In particular, encourage these small high schools to create school schedules that maximize learning time for students and planning time for faculty.

3. Create a stronger accountability model that holds schools accountable for having effective practices for all students.

As schools are granted more autonomy, methods of accountability will need to be developed to press urban high schools to create instruction, curriculum, and assessment practices that improve learning for all students. Periodic school quality review is a promising model that demonstrates the potential for outside examination to spur improved practice and, as a result, higher student achievement. Crucial to an effective school quality review process is that it is timely (every four to five years) and carries high stakes; schools found to be non-performing can be shut down. Among the nine CERP higher performing urban high schools, the two Boston Pilot schools and three charter schools undergo school quality reviews as part of their high-stakes accountability process.⁸

The quality review process includes assessment of a school's progress on a broad range of engagement and performance indicators, including: waiting lists; attendance, attrition, transfer, suspension, and exclusion rates; grade retention, course failure, graduation, and college-going rates; MCAS scores; samples of student work; and results of school-based performance assessments, such as portfolios and exhibitions.

There are steps that both the state and districts can take to increase school-level accountability for our urban high schools.

At the state level:

- *Adopt a school quality review model of accountability, currently used for charter schools and Boston's Pilot Schools, for all urban high schools. Place all urban high schools on a five-year cycle for school quality review.* Such a process could be delegated to urban districts, with each district submitting its proposed school quality review process, including benchmarks, to the state for review and approval. Alternatively, the state could administer the process, expanding the charter school quality review process to include all urban high schools.
- *Assess the effectiveness of urban high schools using multiple sources of data rather than only MCAS rates.* Give consideration to multiple indicators of engagement and performance to ensure that every urban high school is successful with all students enrolled at the school. Indicators of engagement (the ability to involve students in school and learning in a sustained way) should include attendance, attrition, transfer, suspension, and exclusion rates. Performance indicators should include grade-retention, course-failure, graduation, and college-going rates, along with samples of student work, including exhibitions and portfolios, in addition to MCAS scores.
- *Adopt a value-added methodology for assessing high school performance on the MCAS.* By comparing the MCAS scores earned by students prior to entering high school (i.e., grade seven and eight MCAS scores) to their grade ten MCAS performance, the state can establish a reliable and inexpensive way to assess the "value-added" contribution of a high school to its students' MCAS performance.

- *Strengthen the current state charter school system of accountability.* While a worthy process that has received praise from many, the current process should be improved in several ways:
 - Examine enrollment patterns carefully to ensure that each charter school enrolls a representative sample of students from the district(s) from which it draws, including consideration for race, income, gender, language, and special needs by prototype.
 - Encourage urban charter high schools with patterns of low engagement and performance to adopt the model of a proven successful urban high school, and help facilitate the partnerships between them. Be more aggressive in closing down urban charter high schools that have been low performing over time.

At the district level:

- *Adopt a school quality review model of accountability for all district high schools. Place all district high schools on a five-year cycle for the school quality review process, facilitated by the district's central office.*
- *Adopt value-added methodology to evaluate school performance on MCAS as well as other important performance indicators, such as drop-out and retention rates.* By comparing students' academic performance and attendance record prior to entering high school (e.g., grade eight MCAS scores, attendance, number of courses passed) to their performance in high school, the district can more accurately and fairly assess the performance of each of its high schools.
- *Promote the use of performance-based tasks to assess student performance, and to affect decisions such as promotion and graduation.*

4. Leverage benefits of choice to build more effective school communities.

As illustrated by the urban schools highlighted in the CERP report, having parents, students, and faculty make an affirmative choice to opt into a particular learning community establishes the foundation for a culture of high expectations and mutual obligations. It enables schools to build a unified, singular vision around which everyone rallies.

The danger, of course, is that choice can become a means of sorting students and limiting access. Critical to any discussion of school choice as a means of facilitating school improvement is ensuring that the process, whether at the state or district level, results in schools enrolling a cross-section of students—taking into consideration race, income, gender, special education status, and language—who are representative of the larger district(s) from which they are drawn.

Boston's Pilot school initiative provides a road map for how urban districts can foster the creation of small schools of choice. These small, mission-driven schools have been created largely by design teams of teachers, administrators, parents, and community members who have compelling visions of how best to serve low-income students and students of color. These schools are staffed by teachers who are committed to each school's design and its standards, and the students (and their parents) who choose them know just what their choice has committed them to. The implied—and, in some cases, explicit—contractual relationship between teachers and students who have voluntarily committed themselves to a shared academic endeavor is a powerful tool for promoting achievement. And the long waiting lists at Boston Pilot schools stand as a testament to the appeal of these schools of choice in the state's largest urban district. The state's charter school initiative offers an important state policy lever for fostering voluntary membership. The 46 Commonwealth charter schools provide examples of schools with distinctive designs, run on an autonomous basis, that draw their staff and student bodies by choice. Horace Mann charters, like Boston's Pilot schools, provide a means of exercising choice within larger urban districts.

But more can and should be done to promote the development of small schools of choice.

At the state level:

- *Build broad, bipartisan support for a system of small schools of choice.* The Governor, the Massachusetts Board of Education, and legislative leaders should work together to promote more effective small school communities consisting of staff and students who choose to be there, while building in adequate safeguards that ensure each school enrolls a representative cross-section of students.
- *Focus the state's intervention strategy for failing urban schools and districts on creating new, small school choice options for students and parents.* This includes requiring that school districts provide a mechanism, like Boston's Pilot schools, that gives educators, parents, and community members who embrace a common vision the power to form new small schools and the freedom to select faculty who demonstrate a commitment to the school's vision and educational practices.
- *Support this intervention strategy by prioritizing the award of Commonwealth and Horace Mann charters toward the creation of small school options in under-performing urban districts that are either unwilling or unable (because of current terms of union-management contract agreements) to create sufficient small school options based on the principle of voluntary membership.*
- *Require charter school applicants to delineate how they will establish a membership process that fosters a culture of high academic performance and mutual accountability, without setting up barriers or other discouragement to students who have not experienced academic success.* Charter schools should demonstrate that they have a clear and welcoming process for informing students and parents of the goals and expectations of the school, and that they are able to make good on their end of the membership bargain by fostering success for students of all backgrounds. Charter schools that fail to attract and retain a representative cross-section of students should be required to take corrective action or risk loss of their charter.

At the district level:

- *Make the principle of voluntary membership in small, personalized, and academically challenging high schools a cornerstone of district policy and teacher-union labor agreements.* This means implementing policies like those of Boston's Pilot school agreement or promoting the development of Horace Mann Charters. It also means abandoning reform strategies based on assigning teachers or students to a particular small learning community on an involuntary basis and without substantial budgetary and operational authority. This strategy of forcing teachers who do not share a common philosophy or vision to work together in an environment that does not give them the tools to create a personalized learning culture has not proved effective as an urban high school reform strategy.
- *Phase out large, failing high schools and replace them with small, autonomous schools of choice.* This includes making school buildings that now house large, failing high schools available for use by either district-sponsored small schools or state-sponsored Horace Mann charters.

5. Create effective inclusion programs for English language learner students and students with special needs.

In all seven of the small urban high schools, inclusion was more the norm than the exception with English language learners and students with special needs.

In these CERP schools, ELL and special needs students are enrolled and participate in regular courses of study along with all other students. These schools have adopted the philosophy that every student, regardless of classification, is the responsibility of every staff member, as opposed to many schools in which the responsibility for ELL and special needs students is assigned to separate staff. Faculty with different specialty areas collaborate in meeting the needs of ELL and special needs students across the curriculum and program areas, both through teaming in the classroom and in common planning time to design curriculum and instructional strategies that meet students' individual needs. In each school, this does not preclude providing some students with specialized support at scheduled times, often in learning centers. However, these students are held to the same high

expectations as all students, while being provided with accommodations that assist them to reach the expected standards and competencies. Many examples of this same philosophy and these practices were also found at the two larger CERP high schools.

In following the examples drawn from these schools, there are steps that both the state and urban districts can take to increase the success of ELL and special needs students.

At the state level:

- *Revise state special education regulations to favor well-constructed inclusion programs over substantially separate special education programs.* Provide incentives to urban school districts to design well-crafted and implemented inclusion programs.
- *Collaborate with colleges and universities to revise teacher preparation programs to include dual certification programs (gaining certification in both academic content and in English as a second language or special education), and make it more attractive for teachers to enroll in these programs and attain dual certification.* Doing so would enable increased inclusion programs and practices to occur.
- Identify, highlight, and promote effective inclusion programs and strategies for urban high school ELL and special needs students. Provide technical assistance grants to these programs to work with other urban high schools to replicate these practices.

At the district level:

- *Create a process by which schools can gain inclusion status to serve substantially separate special education students in regular education classrooms with appropriate support.*
- *Ensure adequate language support to non-native English speaking students in regular academic classes and programs.*
- *Identify, highlight, and promote effective inclusion programs within the district for urban high school ELL and special needs students.* Provide funds and facilitation to these programs to work with district high schools to replicate these practices.

6. *Create more 6-12 and 7-12 schools.*

The success of University Campus Park School demonstrates the advantage of starting early with students, using grades seven and eight to provide intensive literacy instruction and strengthening of academic and English language skill gaps. By grade nine, students who entered the school with low literacy skills excel in demanding, honors-level academic classes. In contrast, the difficulties encountered by MATCH in retaining a segment of students who enter with limited academic skills points to the challenge of imposing rigorous and unyielding demands on older students who haven't received a supportive preparatory experience.

Schools based on a grade 6-12 or 7-12 design are able to provide older students with continuity and personalization in their high school experience, while providing students a greater amount of time in a seamless, six- or seven-year college preparatory program. Expanded use of this school design is a promising strategy to achieve the ultimate goal of education reform, which is to make sure that all students meet the high academic standards necessary for success in college and beyond.

At the state level:

- *Provide incentives for urban school districts to create small high schools with grade 6-12 and 7-12 configurations.* These incentives could include construction funds to support renovation of existing facilities or construction of new facilities to house such schools, and a grants program to help finance the planning and start-up costs for integrating pre-high school grades.
- *Give priority to this secondary school design in awarding Horace Mann and Commonwealth charters.*

At the district level:

- *Make the creation of small secondary schools that start in grade six or seven a priority in high school reform initiatives.*

7. Make college and community partnerships a cornerstone of state and district strategies to create high schools of excellence for low-income urban students and students of color.

In several of the higher performing schools, college partnerships play a powerful role in fostering high-quality teaching and strong college-preparatory academic environments. College partners provide tutors, student teachers, professional development, and access to college courses. At their best, these partnerships are akin to those between medical schools and teaching hospitals in which professionals from both institutions collaborate to improve teaching practice and prepare new teachers based on proven methods. Students from participating high schools see themselves as junior members of a college community and begin to experience college success while still in high school.

The power of college partnerships is further demonstrated by the success of an outstanding alternative high school for dropouts, the Lowell Middlesex Charter Academy. The school, which serves a highly at-risk population of 100 students ages 15-21 who have dropped out of neighboring high schools, had a 100 percent pass rate on the 2002 English language arts MCAS test; only its low math scores kept it off the CERP list. The school was able to reverse its poor showing in math in 2003, with a 91 percent pass rate. Founded by Middlesex Community College, the school continues to rely heavily on this college partnership. The college gives curriculum support to faculty, conducts professional development with teaching and administrative staff, and gives students access to college courses and the use of college facilities and support services.

The schools in the CERP study also rely heavily on partnerships with local corporations and community agencies to provide students with a range of academically enriching experiences, adult mentors, internships and community service opportunities, and important health and social services.

State government and local communities can help leverage these critical college and community resources in several ways to create more effective urban high schools.

At the state level:

- *Enlist every public college and university in the state to create at least one substantial university-school partnership with a small high school that enrolls a high percentage of low-income students and students of color.* Such partnerships could include supporting a small high school on campus, jointly sponsoring teacher training programs and collaborative professional development, providing tutoring and other academic supports to students, or providing dual enrollment in college courses. Partnerships can also involve the creation of an early college high school, a new small school design where students earn both a high school diploma and up to two years of college credit.
- *Have the Governor and other key state leaders use the power of their offices to launch a formal campaign to enlist every private college and university in the state to support at least one substantial university-school partnership with urban high schools serving high percentages of low-income students and students of color, modeled after the Clark University/UPCS partnership.*
- *Restore and increase spending in the state's Dual Enrollment Program to support high school students who take college courses as part of the college-preparatory experience, and target dual enrollment resources toward partnerships between state colleges and schools servicing low-income students and students of color.* Giving students the opportunity to earn college credits and begin to experience college success while still in high school is a powerful college preparatory strategy. Replicating partnerships such as Clark University/UPCS within the state college system will require restoration of this funding source.
- *Use the urban teacher internship training programs developed by Tufts University (in collaboration with Fenway and Boston Arts Academy) and Clark University (with University Park Campus School) as models for restructuring the state college and university teacher training programs.*

At the district level:

- Make college partnerships an essential component of the district's strategy to create effective small high schools and mobilize school district resources toward that goal.
- Mobilize political, civic, community, and higher education leaders to support a high-profile, public-private partnership initiative to make college and community partnerships a cornerstone of the community's urban high school reform strategy.
- Inventory current public and private philanthropic funding that supports academic and other enrichment activities for older urban youth in the community, and identify ways to more effectively target those funds to support more coherent partnership models.

8. Provide increased resources to high schools that enroll high percentages of low-income students and other high-need groups.

As we have found with the schools cited in the CERP study, most successful urban high schools are entrepreneurial. These schools generally operate at a higher per pupil level of funding than they receive from their districts, raising additional funds on their own in order to provide the services they think meet student needs. It is laudable that they are finding ways to supplement their district or state allocations. But, implicitly, these successful schools are demonstrating that urban schools need additional funding to achieve their mission of effectively educating student populations in which a high percentage are low-income, are black or Latino, speak a first language other than English, or have special needs.

Equity does not mean equal resources. Rather, equity means acknowledging that educating today's urban students takes more resources than educating their suburban counterparts. To close the achievement gap, urban schools need to have smaller class sizes, lower student loads for teachers, greater amounts of faculty planning and professional development time, longer instructional periods, and more intensive student supports than they are currently funded for. If we are truly committed to helping each and every student learn at high levels, then it is incumbent upon us to provide urban high schools with the resources that it really takes to be successful.

At the state level:

- Substantially increase state per pupil funding formulas to increase the weighting for urban high schools.
- Enact regulations that allow urban high schools to carry over funds from one fiscal year to the next, as charter schools are currently allowed to do. The ability to conserve financial resources when they can and spend when they want to would give these schools greater financial flexibility to serve student needs.

At the district level:

- Create weighted formulas when determining high school budgets, providing higher per pupil amounts for schools with low-income students, ELL students, and special education students. This ensures that those high schools serving the students with the greatest needs receive more equitable budgets.
- Reallocate, on a per pupil basis, all centrally based professional development funds to the school level. This enables urban high schools to consolidate their professional development resources around creating small, personalized, mission-driven schools, each with a strong professional collaborative culture focused on strengthening teaching and learning.

9. Provide strong incentives for higher performing urban schools to replicate their success.

One of the most underused strategies in urban education reform is giving leaders of proven school designs the authority and financing to replicate their success. The long waiting lists for admission to many of the schools in the CERP study demonstrate a strong demand by parents and students for such schools. Replication of higher

performing school designs can take many forms. A state or school district can authorize a successful school organization to open and operate additional schools or fund it to provide formal apprenticeship-style training and technical support to school teams interested in implementing its design.

There are several steps that the state and school districts can take to make much greater use of this strategy to create small schools of excellence for low-income urban students.

At the state level:

- *Give priority in awarding of both Commonwealth and Horace Mann charters to the operators of higher performing urban schools who wish to create additional schools based on their models and practices and to applicants that form replication partnerships with these school operators.*
- *Provide grant incentives to school districts to replicate successful models of small high schools, approved by an independent panel that carefully reviews and validates the performance data of schools seeking designation as model schools. With each awarded grant, ensure that a portion of the funds is designated for the model school to provide technical assistance in the design and implementation of the replication school(s).*

At the district level:

- *Grant the leadership of high-performing small high schools the authority to open and operate a second school site in their district, including the power to select the new site principal and staff.*
- *Invite the operators of successful small urban schools to replicate their models in the district, and provide them with the conditions (e.g., autonomy over budget, staffing, curriculum, governance, time) and support (e.g., planning funds for design teams) to ensure the success of replication efforts.*

Conclusion: A Challenge to the State and to Urban Districts

The CERP study, which identifies nine urban high schools as higher performing, challenges us all to enable every urban high school in the state to achieve similar results. But urban high school reform is not going to occur by merely touting the success of the nine schools identified in the CERP study and calling on other urban high schools and districts to achieve the same success. High performance will be within reach of every urban high school—and every urban high school student—only if the conditions by which excellent teaching and personalized learning cultures can be obtained are universal.

Accomplishing this will take a close examination of longstanding state and district regulations and policies that impede progress. We seek to create as unfettered and level a playing field as possible for urban high schools to make greater and more uniform strides toward the goal of high achievement for every student. Let us not leave talented educators standing alone in our urban high schools, frustrated by the lack of support that makes it that much more difficult to realize this dream. In this paper, we challenge both the Commonwealth and urban districts to step up to the plate of education reform and provide the supportive conditions and environment necessary to make every urban high school an example of high performance.

End Notes

¹ Marzano, Robert. 2003. *What Works in Schools*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD; Murphy, Joseph, et al. 2001. *The Productive High School*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press; and Bryk, Anthony, et al. 1993. *Catholic Schools and the Common Good*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

² The MCAS performance of three other small urban schools that were excluded from the CERP study provides additional evidence to support the claim that small is better. City on the Hill Charter School in Boston met the criteria for designation as a “higher performing” school but was excluded from the study by the author who determined that she could not accurately document the practices linked to City on the Hill’s 2002 MCAS scores due to significant changes in the school’s leadership and staff between the 2002 and 2003 school years. Another small urban K-12 school with qualifying MCAS scores, Somerville Charter High School, was excluded from the study because it did not serve a high enough percentage of low-income students in 2002. Somerville Charter school improved its MCAS scores in 2003 (100 percent passed ELA exam, 91 percent passed math exam) with a student body comprised on 65 percent students of color and 48 percent low-income. A third small urban school, South Boston Harbor Academy, which has achieved exceptional MCAS scores, was also excluded from consideration because it did not serve a sufficiently high percentage of low-income and minority students in 2002. South Boston Harbor Charter is now making a strong effort to attract a more diverse pool to its lottery, and it will be important to see if it is able to achieve similar results with a more mixed group of students.

³ Lynn Classical’s pass rate on the MCAS English language arts exam was the lowest on the “higher performing” list, and its pass rate in math was third lowest, despite the fact that Lynn Classical has the lowest percentage of low-income students (47.4 percent) and second lowest percentage of minority students (49.8 percent) among the ten selected schools. The MCAS ELA and math pass rates for Somerville, while better than those of Lynn Classical, are less impressive given the demographics of the school. Somerville ranked fifth among the nine schools in percentage of students passing the ELA exam and fourth in the math exam, despite having the lowest share of minority students (42.9 percent) and among the lowest proportion of low-income students (53.2 percent).

⁴ Center for Collaborative Education. 2003. “How Pilot Schools Authentically Assess Student Mastery.” Boston, MA.

⁵ Stiefel, Leanna, Robert Berne, Patrice Iatarola, and Norm Fruchter. 2000. 2000. “High School Size: Effects on Budgets and Performance in New York City.” *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*. Spring, Vol. 22, No. 1, pp. 27-39.

⁶ Lawrence, Barbara Kent, et al. 2002. “Dollars and Sense: The Cost Effectiveness of Small Schools.” Cincinnati, OH: KnowledgeWorks Foundation.

⁷ Unlike Commonwealth charter schools, which operate independently of school districts and can hire non-union staff, Horace Mann charters require the approval of the superintendent, school committee, and the local teachers’ union, and their staffs are part of the local teachers’ union.

⁸ School quality reviews generally include the following components:

- They are based on a set of public benchmarks of what constitutes the practices and policies of an effective school.
- They require a process of self-examination, reflection, and assessment on the part of the school, based on the benchmarks, and the synthesis of this self-assessment into a document for public review (often, a school portfolio).
- They involve a team of external practitioners (usually teachers and administrators from other schools and districts; higher education, community, and business representatives; and parents) that spends at least several days to review data and collect other multiple forms of documentation (e.g., school portfolio, classroom and team observations, shadowing students, interviews) that provide evidence of a school’s progress in meeting the benchmarks.
- They report findings and recommendations from the external review team, and these are made available to the administration and faculty of the school, the larger public, and an accrediting body. The report articulates a set of strengths, concerns, and recommendations. These recommendations effectively become a roadmap for future school improvement efforts.
- A school’s status with the district is directly tied to its performance on the school quality review. Based on the review, the accrediting body may approve the school for continuation, continuation on probation or with explicit target goals, or closure.
- They are cyclical, occurring every four to five years, significantly reducing the chances of a school’s performance markedly deteriorating and having a harmful effect on students.

Appendix

Characteristics of Selected High-Performing Schools

In *Head of the Class: Characteristics of Higher Performing Urban High Schools in Massachusetts*, the Center for Education Research & Policy at MassINC identified these nine urban schools for showing, to varying degrees, that they can get impressive academic results with the student populations education reform is meant to serve. Data was collected from the Massachusetts Department of Education and the Web site: <http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/>. See *Head of the Class* for additional information on methodology.

School (2001 enrollment)	Poverty Rate (%)	Minority Enrollment (%)	% Passing 10th Grade ELA MCAS	2002 10th Grade ELA MCAS Score	% Passing 10th Grade Math MCAS	2002 10th Grade Math MCAS Average Score	Dropout Rate (%)	Attendance Rate (%)	% 2 or 4 Year College Plans, 2002
Academy of Pacific Rim (242)	61.6	78.9	89	251	85	245	0	95.5	NA
Accelerated Learning Lab (888)	80.9	61.8	84	242	63	229	5.7	94.3	79.3
Boston Arts Academy (321)	50.0	68.2	89	240	71	233	1.9	89.8	87.0
Fenway High School (255)	58.0	79.6	91	236	69	226	3.1	92.9	72.2
Lynn Classical (1447)	47.4	49.8	83	238	68	231	2.2	91.3	74.8
Media & Tech. Charter (78)	75.6	96.1	94	240	80	233	0	95.1	NA
Sabis International (1175)	53.2	64.9	94	246	73	236	3.1	93.8	NA
Somerville High School (1751)	53.2	42.9	89	239	73	235	3.3	91.9	49.5
University Park Campus (135)	69.6	55.6	100	256	100	253	0	97.1	NA
State Average	26.2	24.9	87	242	75	237	3.5	94.9	72.8